

VZCZCXRO7563
PP RUEHPW
DE RUEHBUL #1948/01 2101056
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 281056Z JUL 08
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4912
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFIUU/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 001948

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/A,
NSC FOR WOOD
OSD FOR SHIVERS
CENTCOM FOR CG CJTF-101 POLAD

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: HAZARA-KUCHI DISPUTE GOES NATIONAL

REF: A. KABUL 1818
[1](#)B. KABUL 1008

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY. President Karzai's effort to make peace between Hazaras and Kuchis engaged in a dispute over grazing lands is not meeting with early success. The largely Pashtun Kuchi nomads say they are considering temporarily pulling back from disputed grazing lands in central Afghanistan at President Karzai's request, but local media report continued violence. A Karzai success would have eased ethnic tensions that have the stalled National Assembly debate on electoral reform (ref A). Karzai's inability to deliver a permanent solution may harm his credibility among both Pashtuns and Hazaras before next year's presidential elections.

Karzai Speaks, But Did Anyone Listen?

[1](#)2. (SBU) Karzai ordered the evacuation of Kuchis from Bihsud district in Wardak province July 20, although reports from nearby Bamyan province say hundreds of displaced Hazaras are still fleeing from Kuchi raids and seeking refuge deeper into Hazara territory. Kuchi leaders say they are confident of their legal claims to the land and will respect Karzai's order, but many Hazaras doubt the president's sincerity or effectiveness in negotiating a fair compromise and say Kuchis are still occupying their land. For centuries throughout Afghanistan, ethnically Pashtun Kuchi nomads have brought their herds in the summer months into land occupied year-round by other groups, often triggering resentment and occasionally violence. A severe drought in central and northern Afghanistan this past year has severely limited available forage. Local news media report armed Kuchis killed more than a dozen Hazara villagers in Bihsud this month and displaced thousands more from their villages.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Kuchi MPs told PolOff Karzai had promised them a legal resolution in the country's court system next year in return for their sQnding down this year. MP Haji Mullah Tarakhel (Kabul) said Kuchis held legal documents confirming their easement rights to Wardak grazing lands and were confident they would prevail in a fair legal battle. "Kuchis will never leave to others what is within their rights to have," Tarakhel said.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Hazara MP Ustad (Professor) Mohammad Akbari (Bamyan) said Hazaras recognized the government's constitutional obligation to provide for Kuchi nomads, but any claims to land rights disqualified a group from the constitution's

definition of a nomad. Akbari thinks most of the Kuchis in Bihsud are settled Pashtuns looking to claim Hazara land and are ignoring Karzai's order.

15. (SBU) When Hazaras and other non-Pashtuns lashed out against Kuchis last April, angry MPs walked out of the National Assembly's lower house in protest at the nomads' 10 reserved parliamentary seats (ref B). The dispute deadlocked parliament for more than a month and stalled attempts to re-write election laws ahead of next year's presidential elections. Hazara leaders said they would block action on the new electoral law and would take up arms to defend their territory if the government does not find a solution soon (many Hazaras living in the central highlands have largely given up their weapons under the GIROA's Disbandment of Illegally Armed Groups (DIAG) process, while Kuchi nomads have yet to do so.)

Hazara Tempers Running High

16. (SBU) At a July 22 protest in Kabul attended by more than 10,000 Hazaras, MP Haji Mohammad Mohaqeq (Kabul), a former Hazara warlord who is reputed to have visited extreme brutality upon Pashtuns during the civil war, accused Karzai of trying to downplay Kuchi violence against Hazaras in order to hold on to Pashtun support for next year's election. Several thousand Hazaras also demonstrated July 24 outside of UNAMA headquarters in Mazar-e-Sharif, asking for international help to convince the Karzai government to take a stronger stand against Kuchi encroachments in Bihsud.

KABUL 00001948 002 OF 002

17. (SBU) Hazara leaders have exploited the conflict to rally support to their own powerbases. Mohaqeq, who played the most visible role at the Kabul protest, earlier went on a week-long hunger strike over the issue and Vice President Khalili boycotted Cabinet meetings for nearly three weeks. Both ended their personal protests this week, but along with Akbari, have been jockeying for more than a year for leadership of the splintered Hezb-e-Wahdat party, the center of Hazara politics. Shia Ayatollah Muhammad Asif Mohseni, an ethnic Pashtun from Kandahar influential with the Shia Hazara, appears to be trying to moderate the competitive chest-thumping of Mohaqeq, Khalili, and Akbari.WOOD